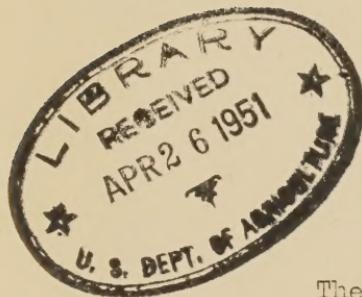


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRIC

Bureau of Agricultural Economi



The Standard of Living of Farm Labo

by

C. Horace Hamilton

Division of Farm Population and Rural W

Presented before the Senate Committ  
on Education and Labor

52 Washington, D. C.

May 1940

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## The Standard of Living of Farm Laborers

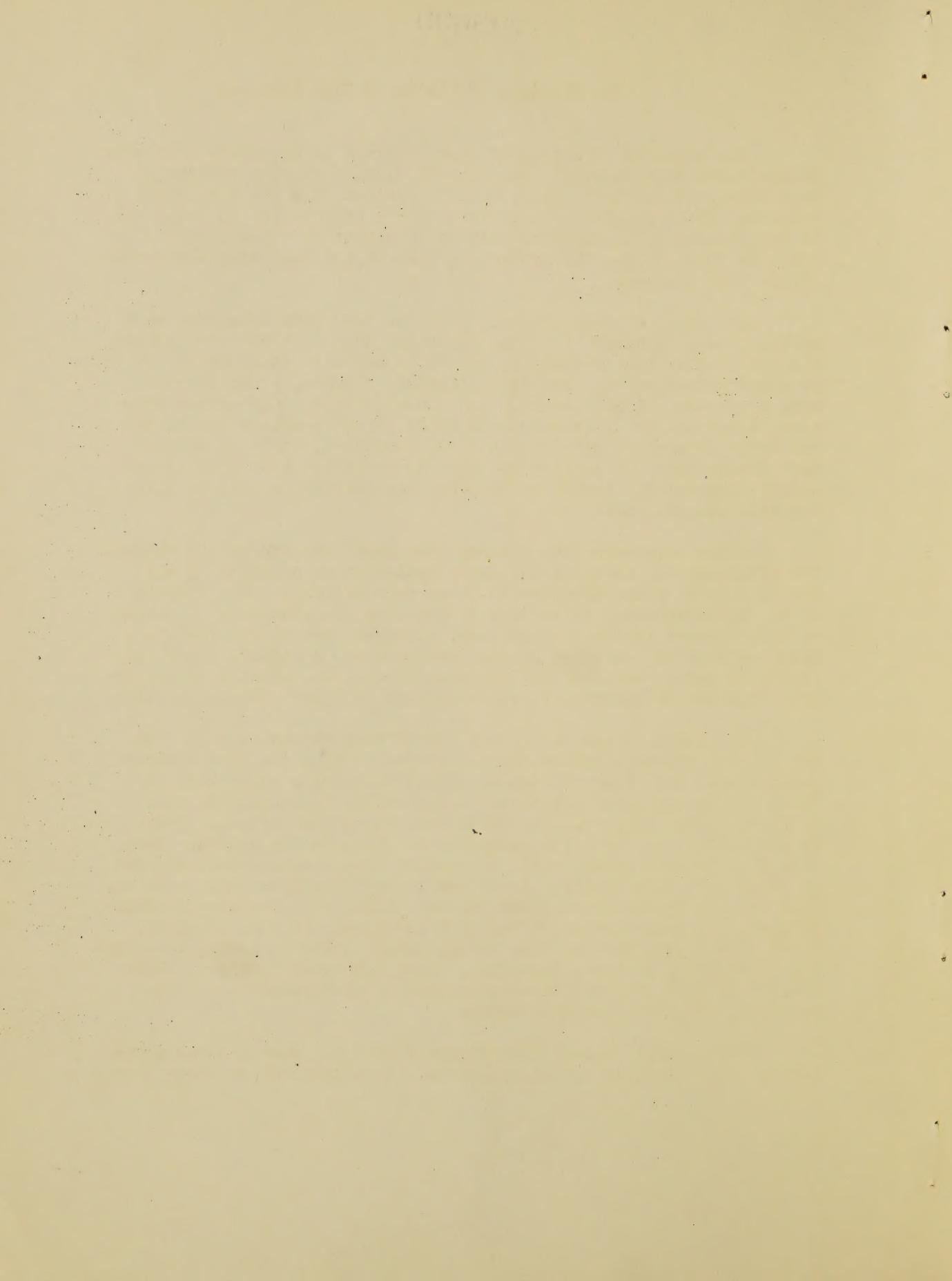
The standard of living of farm laborers is dependent upon many things which this committee has already discussed. The problem of farm labor, it has been shown, is not confined to a few commercial truck and fruit growing areas; it is rather nation-wide in scope and it has ramifications reaching into every aspect of our national economy. In other words, the problem is much bigger than many thoughtful people have dreamed.

The thing that appalls all of us is that farm laborers, as a group, have a standard of living far below that of other occupational classes in America. Naturally, our first and most human desire is to do something about it. Our first impulse, perhaps, is to attempt some simple and direct economic and social action. Our better judgment, based on our experience with other social problems and on our knowledge of similar problems in other countries, leads us to look more deeply into the problem in order to determine what kind of remedial measures are necessary and what the probable result of these remedial measures will be.

Other witnesses have already presented maps and charts showing the standards of living of the farm population as a whole. I wish merely to call your attention to these maps briefly. See Figures 1 to 6. Unfortunately, these maps do not show the standards of living of farm laborer families separately. However, due to the fact that farm laborers are employed by the farmers whose standards are shown, it may be safely assumed that the maps before you indicate the important regional differences in the standards of farm laborers as well.

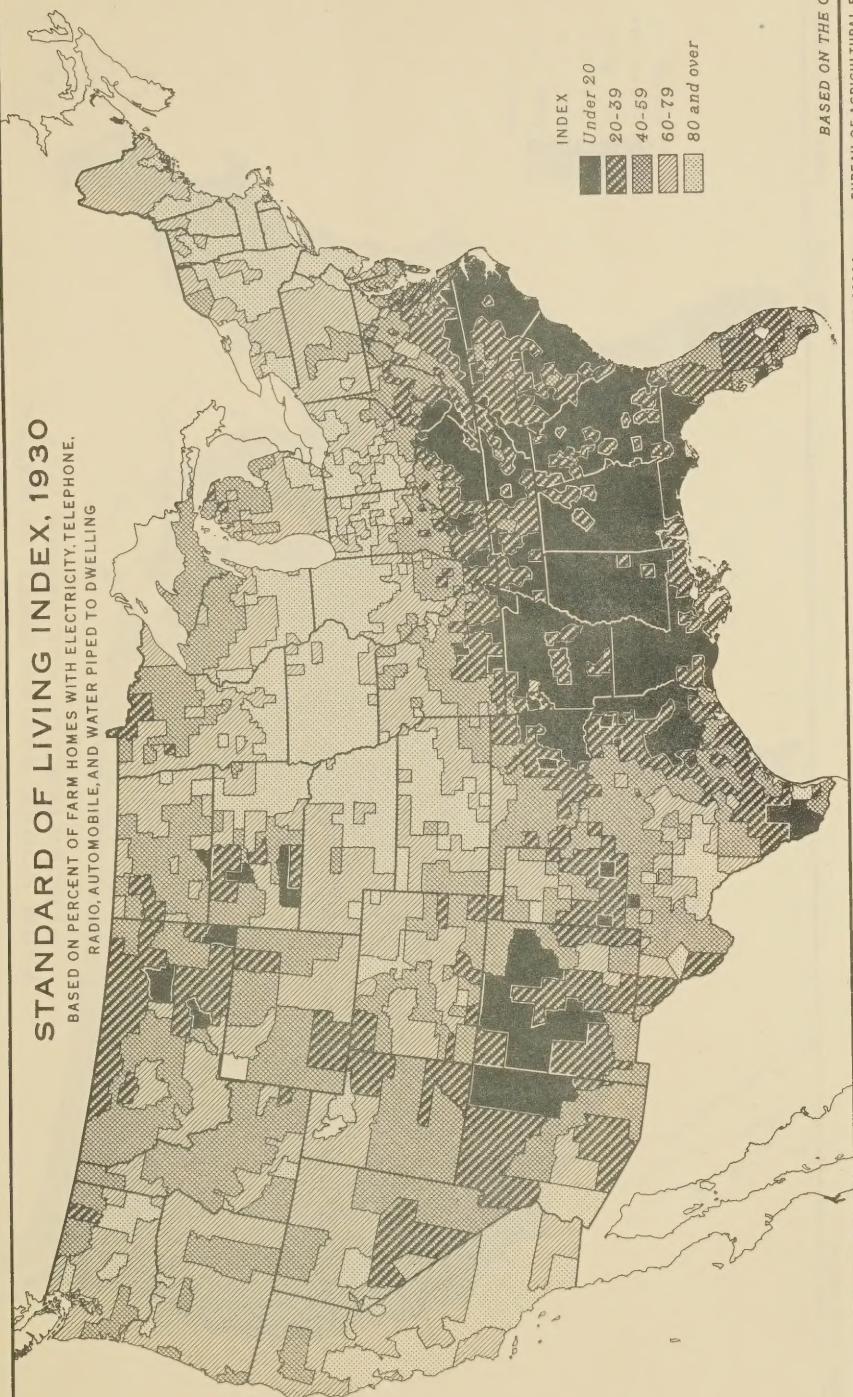
Two other charts to which I direct your attention relate to the natural increase and to the age composition of the farm laborer population. See Figures 7 and 8. The farm laborer population in these charts includes only those people making up households whose heads are farm laborers. The birth rate among farm laborer groups is the highest of any major occupational class in the nation. That this is a serious problem will be readily seen because about one out of every five farm families is a farm laborer family - that is to say they are not operators of farms but are either wage workers or sharecroppers who draw a share of the crop as wages. In this category, which leaves out, for the time being, single laborers living in operator households, we have, therefore, about 1,500,000 families, about 650,000 of whom are in 1935 were classed as sharecroppers and the remaining 850,000 as farm laborers.

Now it will be seen from Figure 7 that the farm laborer population has a distinct age distribution. In comparison to other farm



## STANDARD OF LIVING INDEX, 1930

BASED ON PERCENT OF FARM HOMES WITH ELECTRICITY, TELEPHONE,  
RADIO, AUTOMOBILE, AND WATER PIPED TO DWELLING



BASED ON THE CENSUS  
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NEG. 322964



FARM HOMES HAVING PIPED-IN WATER;  
PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARMS, 1930

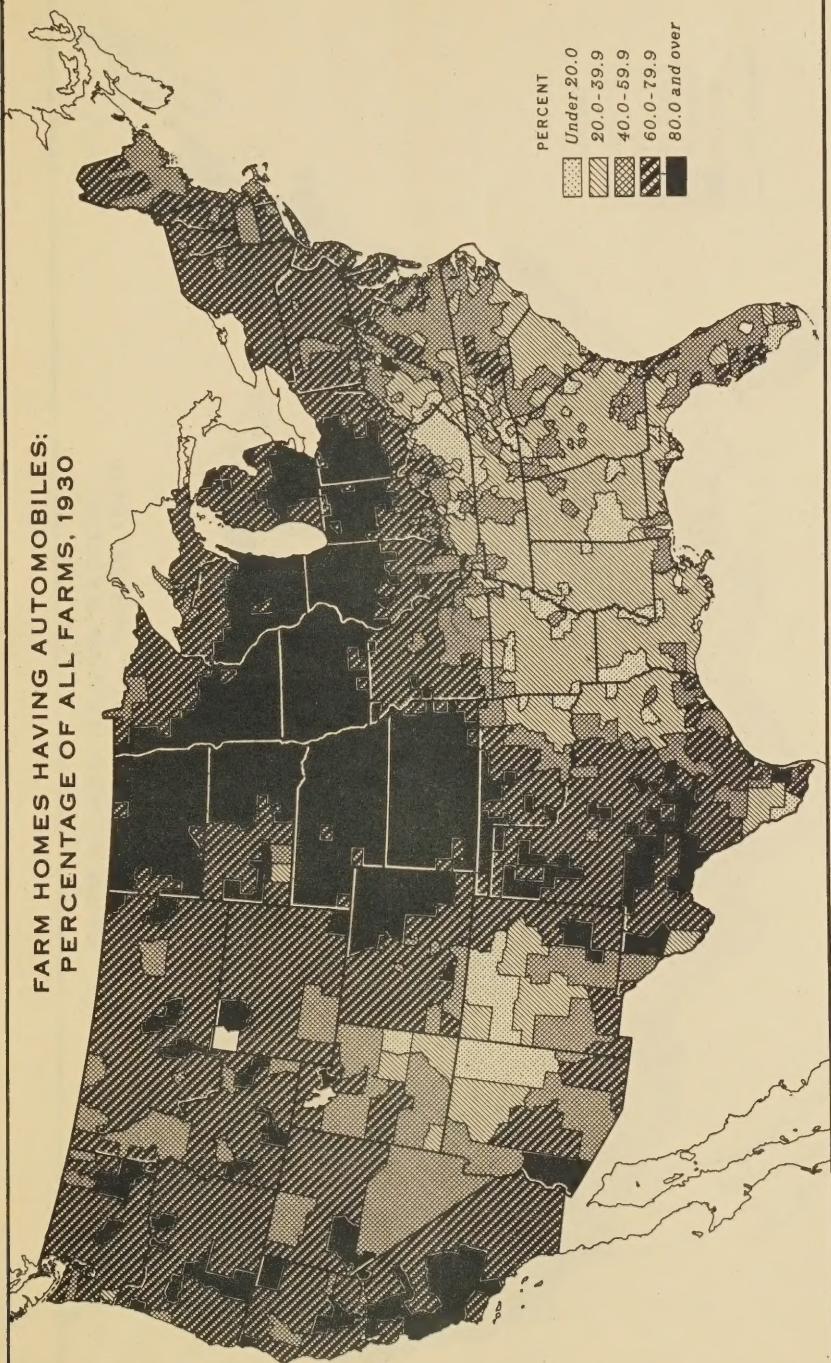
PERCENT  
*Under 1.0*  
1.0 - 9.9  
10.0 - 29.9  
30.0 - 49.9  
50.0 and over  
*Not reported*

NEG. 34070      BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



FARM HOMES HAVING AUTOMOBILES:  
PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARMS, 1930

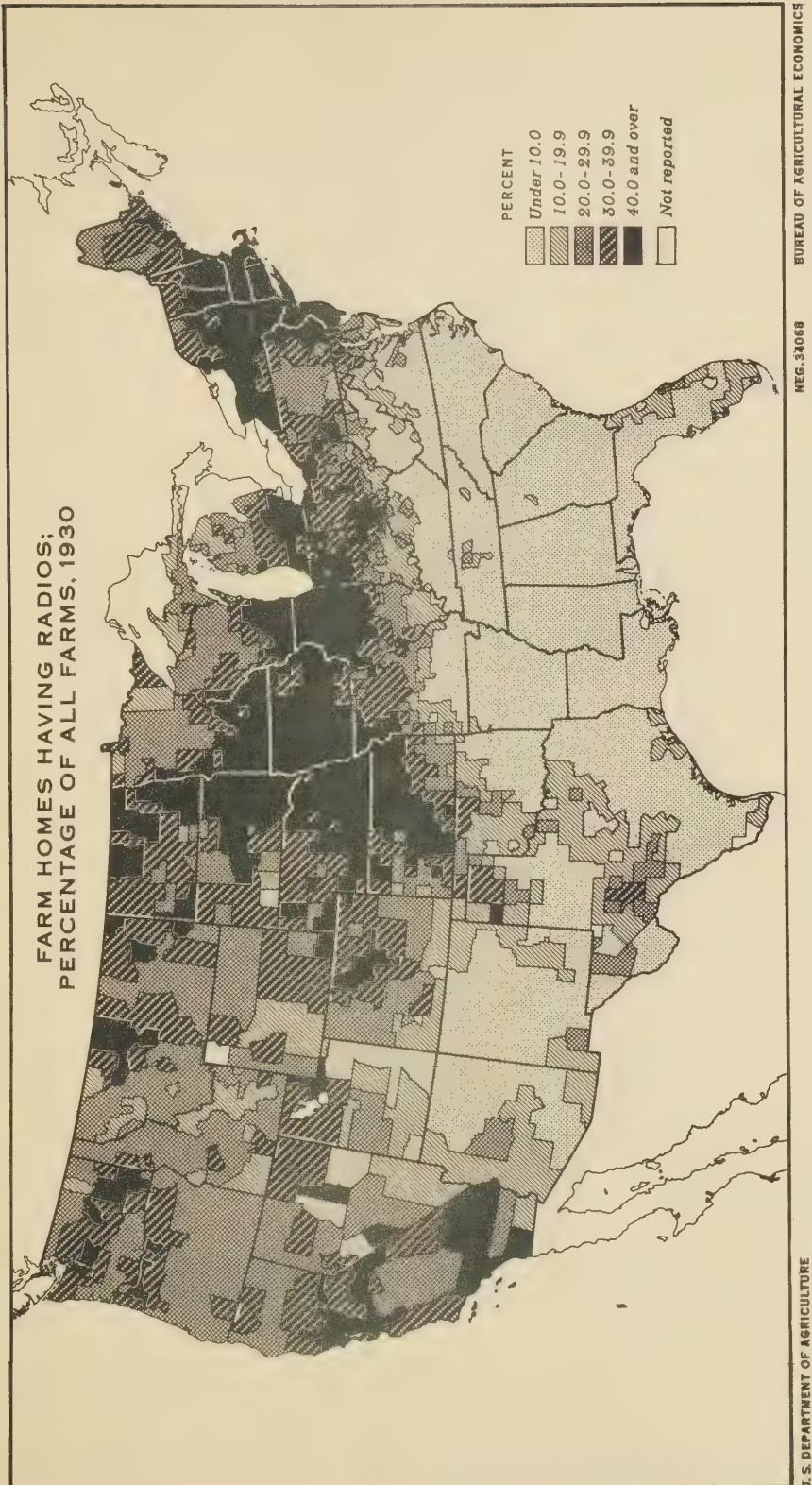


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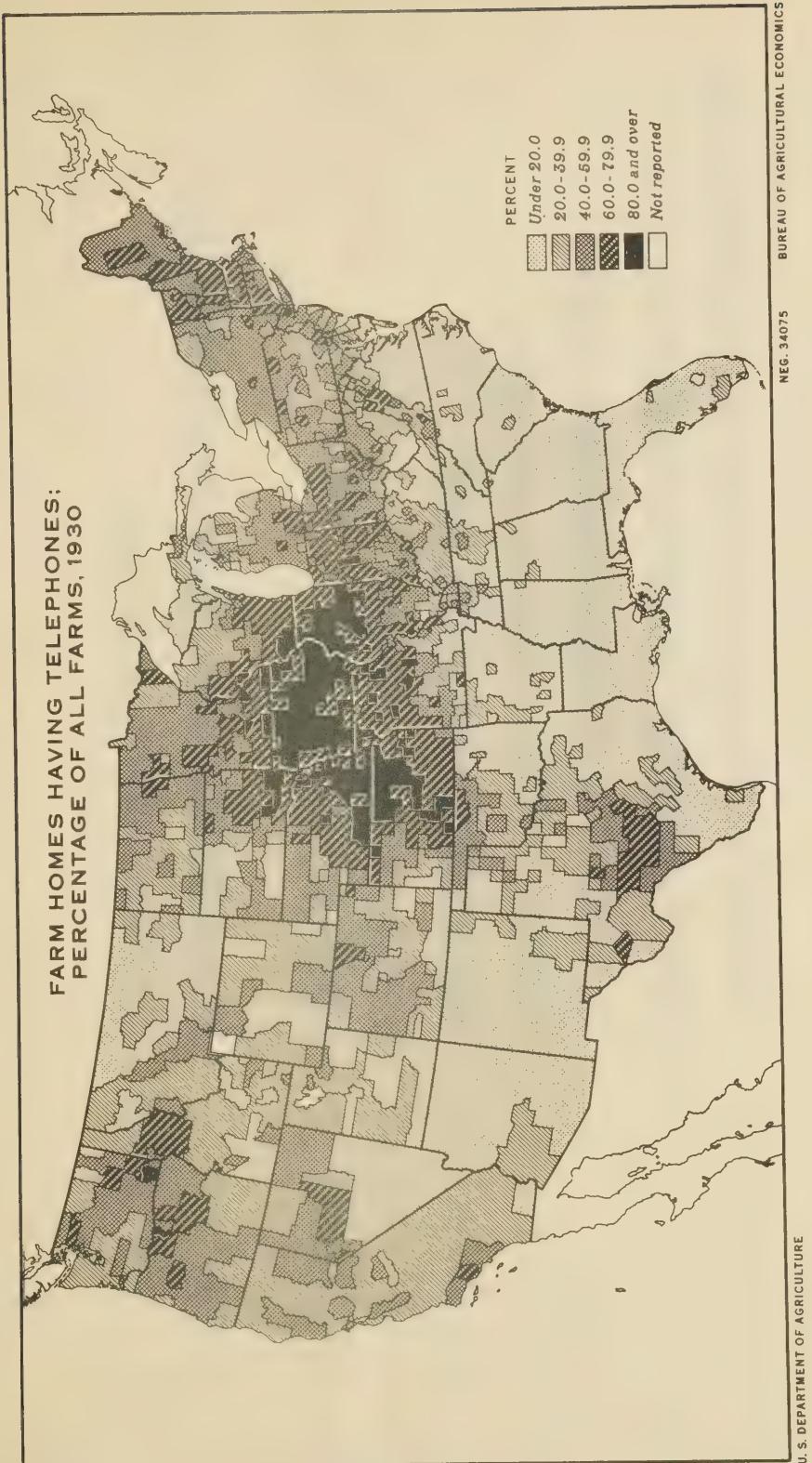


FARM HOMES HAVING ELECTRICITY;  
PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARMS, 1930

PERCENT

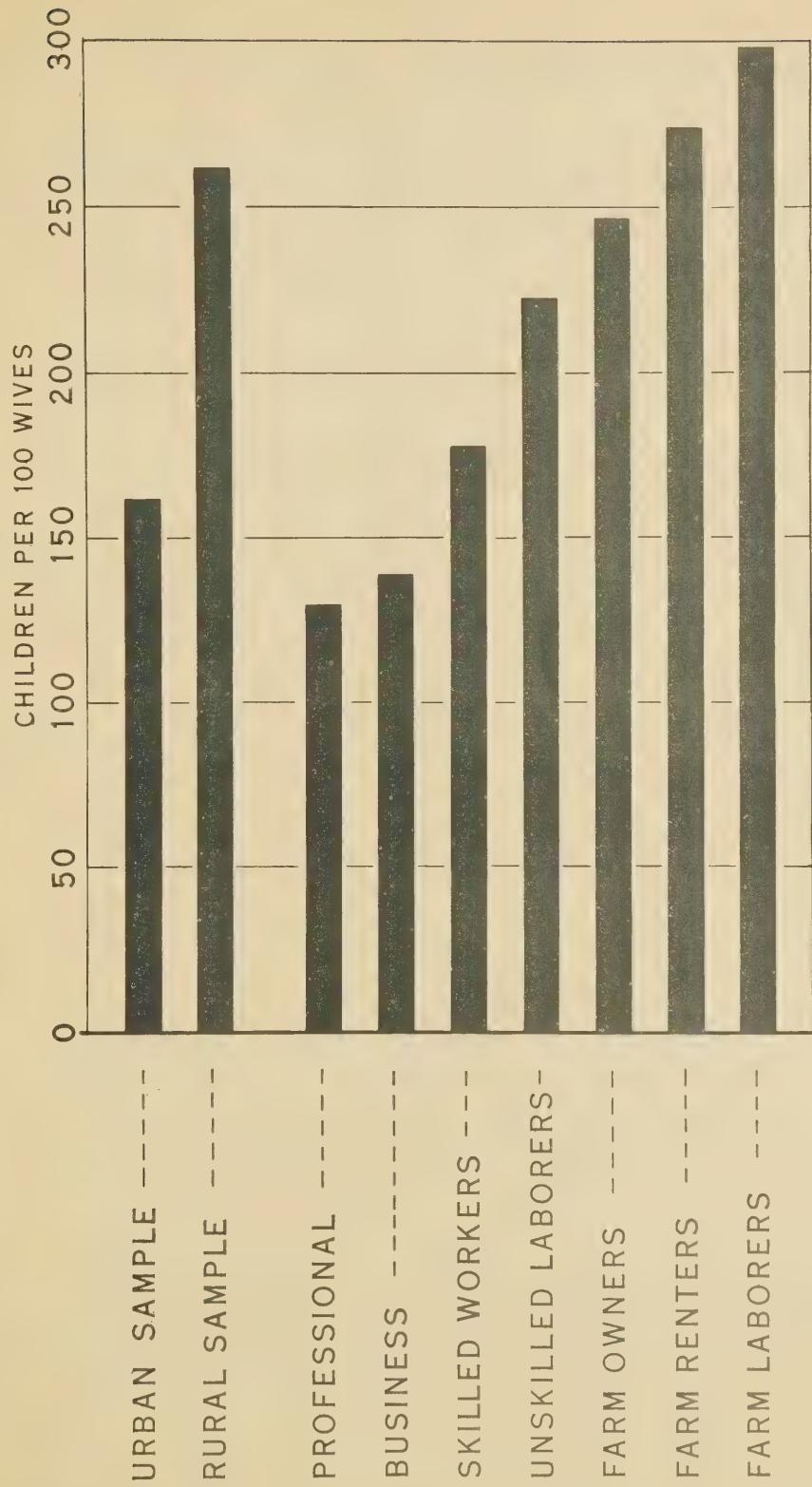
Under 1.0
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30.0-49.9
50.0 and over







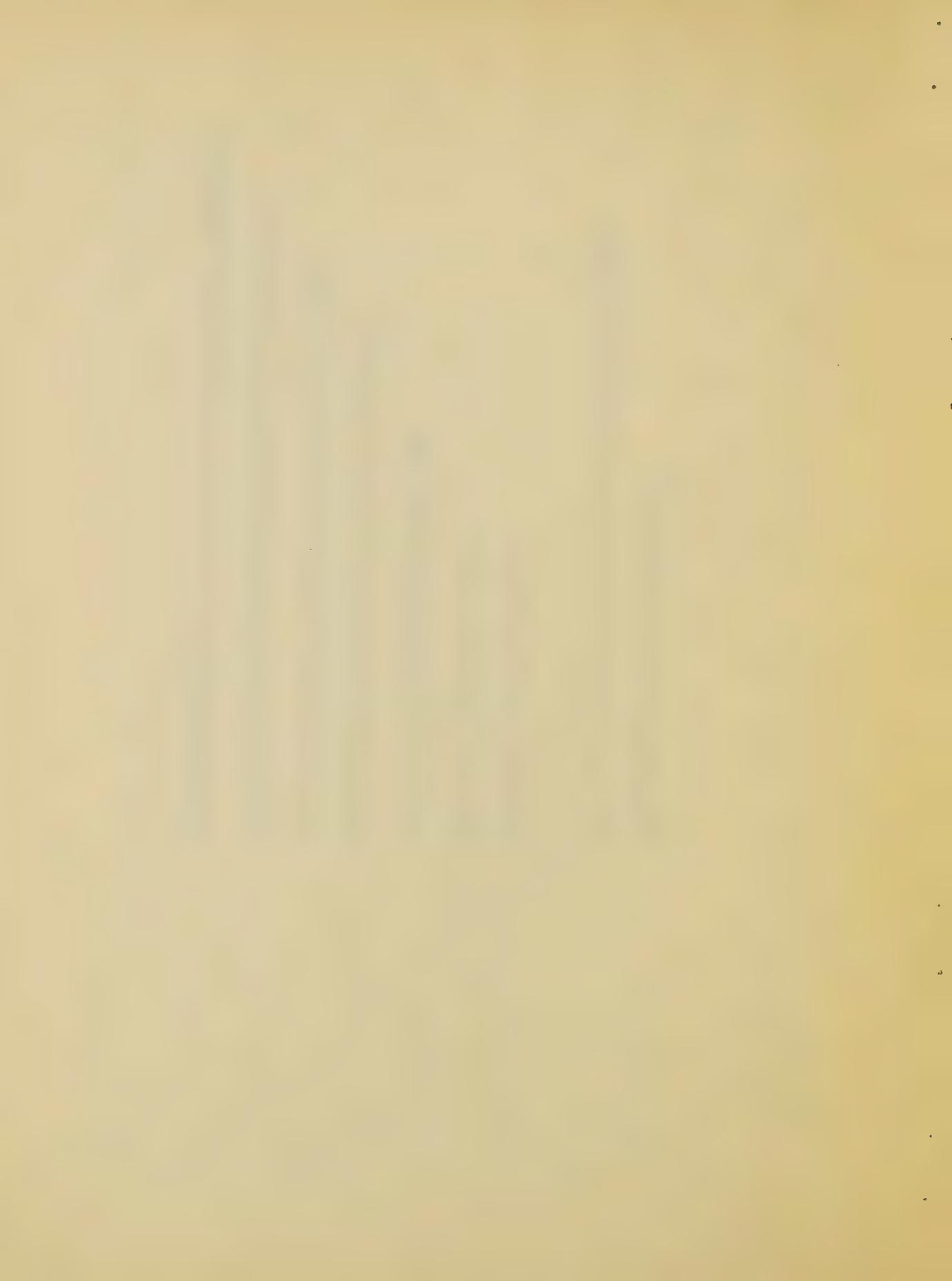
CHILDREN BORN PER 100 WIVES, CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO  
OCCUPATION OF THE HUSBANDS, SELECTED COUNTIES, 1910 \*



\* COMPILED FROM CENSUS OF 1910 BY MILBANK MEMORIAL FUND

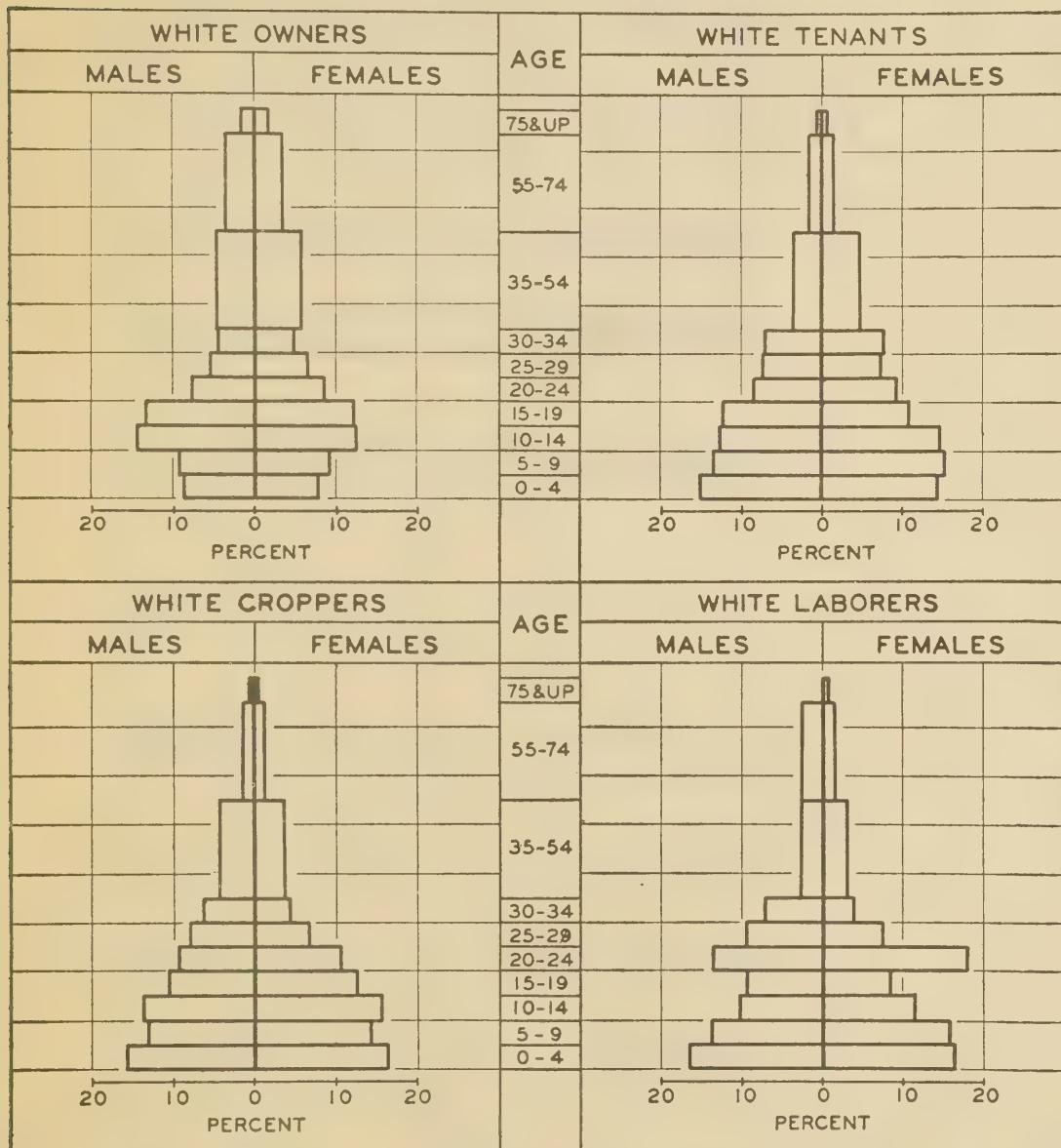
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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# AGE DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE FARM POPULATION

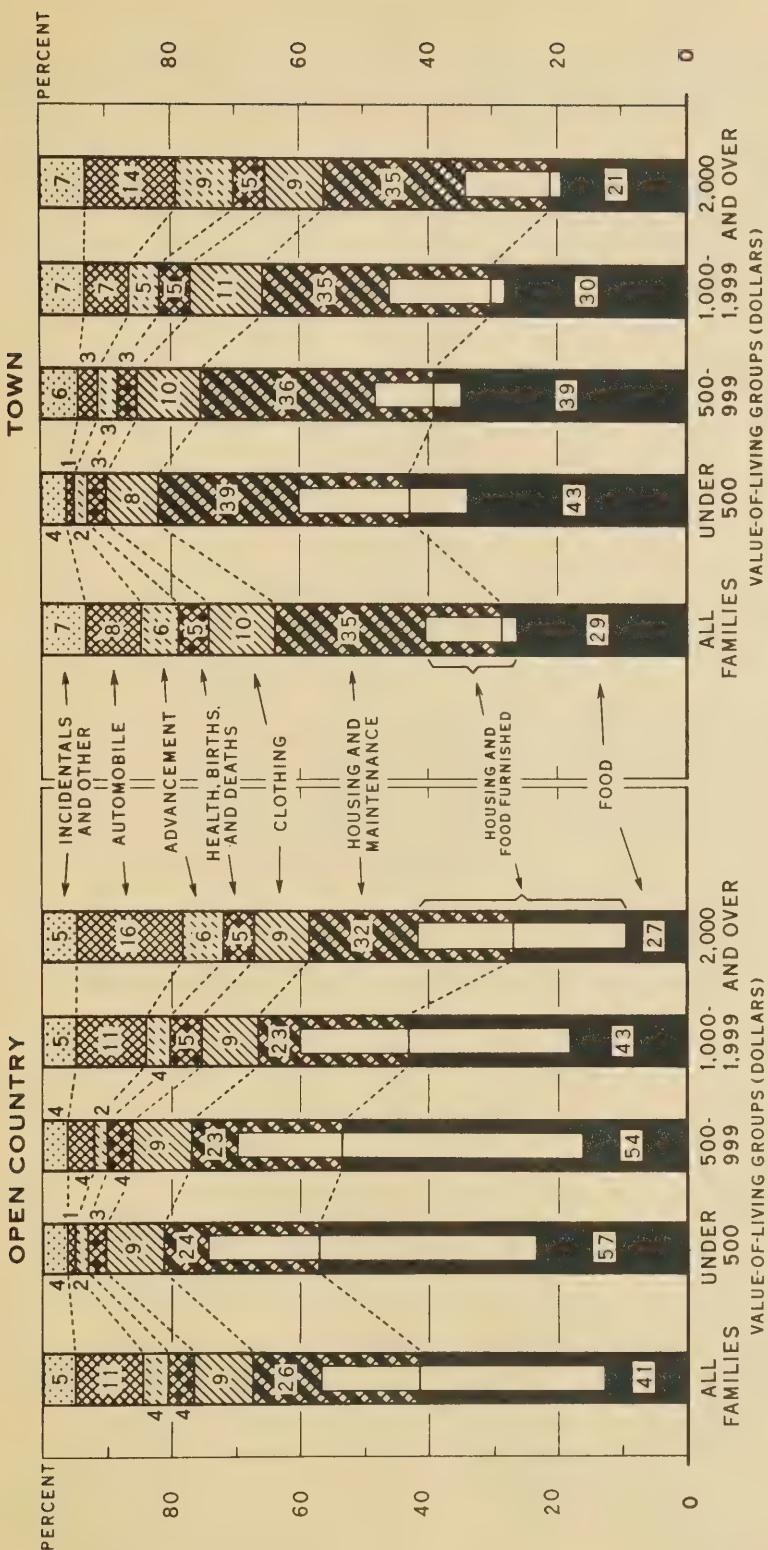
## 5 RURAL AREAS



**Age distribution of the white farm population in the Five Rural Areas.**

Very young children are concentrated in the tenant, cropper, and laborer groups. Middle-aged and old people are concentrated in the white owner groups. However, it is interesting to note that the farm laborer class includes a substantial number of old people.



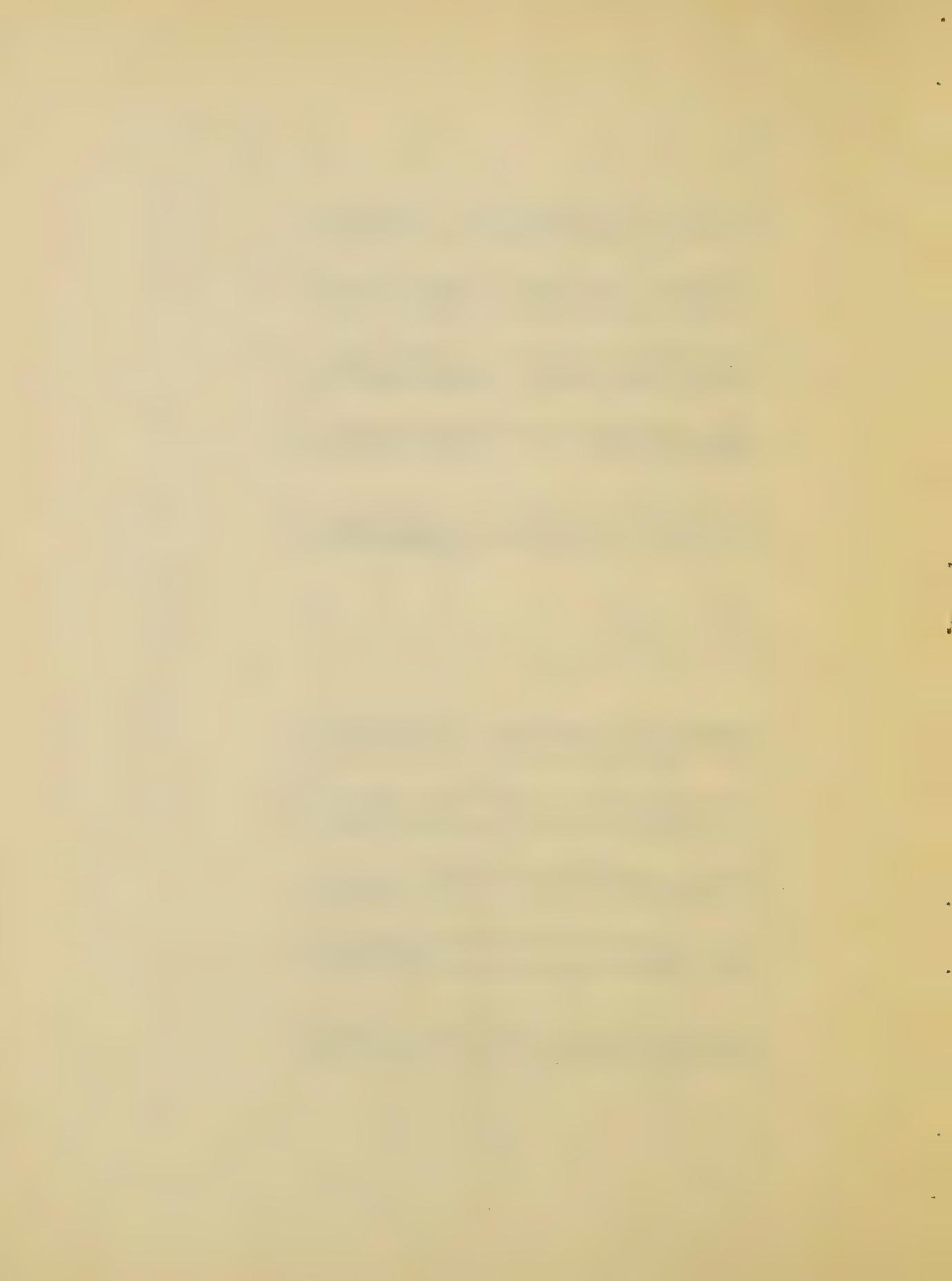


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

NIEC. 35856

FIGURE 3.- PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL VALUE OF FAMILY LIVING AMONG PRINCIPAL GROUPS OF GOODS AND SERVICES CONSUMED, BY RESIDENCE AND VALUE-OF-LIVING GROUPS, 6 VIRGINIA COUNTIES, 1935.



groups, the farm laborer household contains a relatively large number of children under ten years of age and of young parents from 20 to 25 years of age. 1/

All of this relates to my subject in this way: the size and composition of the farm worker's household reveals that the chief breadwinner and his wife have in their young children an economic and social responsibility heavier than that of any other class of parents in America.

Surveys made in many different parts of the country confirm the conclusion which I have just drawn. A study of 946 families of sugar beet laborers in 6 states 2/ shows that the average household contained 6.4 persons, and that 53% of these were under 16 years of age. Children between 6 and 16 years of age made up 24% of all the beet workers in 1935.

A study of 573 households of farm laborers in Texas 3/ during 1938 showed that more than 50% of the population lived in households having 6 or more members; and that 1/3 of the population lived in households of 8 or more persons.

In a study of Migratory Casual Workers in New Mexico 4/, 56.2% of the population were found to be under 20 years of age, and the average size of the families was 4.6 persons. Considering that farm laborer parents are younger than parents in other rural classes, this average of 4.6 is relatively high.

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- 1/ Figure 7 is based upon a North Carolina study, but studies in other states indicate the same general situation.
- 2/ "Welfare of Families of Sugar Beet Laborers" by Elizabeth S. Johnson. A study of child labor and its relation to family work, income, and living conditions in 1935. U. S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau Publication No. 247.
- 3/ Unpublished study of trends in farm tenancy and farm labor in Texas, 1938, made by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, the Works Progress Administration, and the Farm Security Administration, cooperating.
- 4/ "Migratory Workers in New Mexico" by Johanson, Sigurd. Agricultural Experiment Station Press Bulletin 870, March 1939.



A study of 1066 farm laborer households and 961 other rural households in Arizona 5/ showed a median of 4.7 persons per farm laborer household and 3.8 in other rural households.

With few exceptions, other studies show that farm laborer households are large - particularly if the youthfulness of the parents is taken into consideration. There is some reason to believe that some types of farming do attract young married men with no or few children. I refer particularly to young men who operate farm machinery in highly mechanized areas. In some types of mechanized farming, children are no longer an asset. Migratory workers' families in the hop industry were found to be smaller than usual. 6/

#### Low Incomes - Low Standards

The greatest single factor influencing the farm laborers' living standards is income. Considering the size of farm laborer households, the incomes of farm laborers are far below what is needed for a decent standard of living. Let us consider briefly just how the typical low income farm laborer must live under such conditions.

In the first place it means that the farm laborer family must spend most of its income for bare necessities - such as food, clothing, and shelter --and mainly food. Carl C. Taylor and others 7/ have summarized many standard of living studies and they conclude:

"Detailed studies of farm families' standards of living show that when the income is below \$1,000 per year, 59.9% of the entire budget must be spent for food and 92.8% must be spent for purely physical needs, excluding health. Families with incomes as low as \$600 per year cannot even have adequate food, clothing, and shelter, and their lives are inevitably robbed of practically everything except these bare physical necessities. In areas where 50% or more of the families

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5/ "Arizona's Farm Laborers" by E. D. Tetreau. Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 163, May 1939.

6/ "Migratory Labor and the Hop Industry on the Pacific Coast" by C. F. Reuss, Paul H. Landis, and R. Wakefield. Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 363, Pullman Washington.

7/ "Disadvantaged classes in American Agriculture" by Carl C. Taylor, Helen Wheeler, and E. L. Kirkpatrick. Social Research Report No. VIII, April 1938.



live on this low income level, the area can hardly be described as anything but a rural slum. In such areas low-income families not only live under disadvantages themselves, but tend to pull down the level of the social and institutional life of the communities in which they live.

"When gross farm income is at the low level of \$600 per year, an increased proportion of the income naturally must go for food to provide even the barest essentials to sustain life. The housing of families at this income level offers only the very minimum of shelter and comfort and the clothing is anything but adequate. After the items of food, housing, and clothing are accounted for in the family budget, very little, if any, remains for so-called "advancement" items, including education, religion, recreation, charity, insurance, and health."

As illustrating conditions and standards of living growing out of low incomes in many southern lowland areas, I should like to place in the record a statement from "Rich Land - Poor People" by Max R. White, Douglas Ensminger, and Cecil Gregory 8/, an excellent study of the standards of living of farm laborers in seven counties in the rich, lowland areas of southeastern Missouri.

"The story of the plight of these people is pathetically told in their level of living. One-half of the white owner-operators queried by the authors in 1936 had a gross income of less than \$1,269 in 1935, and one-half of the white renters less than \$854. For white sharecroppers the figure was \$415, with \$264 for white farm laborers. Negroes of all tenure groups had an average gross income of only \$251. Although the gross income does not include the value of the dwelling nor the value of the products produced and consumed on the farm, it is obvious from the figures given above that at least one-half of the families do not have sufficient cash income to maintain a decent standard of living. The actual income of the sharecropper is even less than represented here, because of the system of advances used. The sharecropper contracts with the landlord in the spring for "furnish" to make a crop. Having no capital of his own, the sharecropper begins immediately to receive advances from his landlord in the form of cash or merchandise or the establishment of a credit account at a merchant store. When the cotton is picked there is a settlement in which the landlord charges a flat rate of interest on the total amount of the advances. No statistical evidence is available on the rate of interest in this area, but there is reason to

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8/ Published by the Farm Security Administration, Region III,  
Indianapolis, Indiana, 1938.



believe that it is not less than the 10% or more which is charged in many sections of the older Cotton South. The landlord keeps the books, and the tenant is often too ignorant, or, particularly in the case of the Negro, afraid to question the accounts.

"The houses in which the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes live are crude shacks. The typical house in the area is a 'box house' boarded up and down with narrow stripping over the cracks to keep out the weather. Single floors of rough lumber with many cracks are the rule. The roof is frequently of the 'dry weather' type. Inside walls are covered with building paper, cardboard or newspapers or are bare. The exterior is unpainted. Such is the home environment of some 20,000 cropper and laborer families.

"The white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes have few of this world's possessions. Household equipment is meager and inadequate. Such "luxuries" as washing machines, carpet sweepers, and rugs are almost unknown. While 40% of the owner-operators and 26% of the tenants have radios, only 10% of the sharecroppers and 3% of the farm laborers have them. The percentage for automobiles are 4%, 25%, 9% and 5% respectively.

"The diets of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes are meager and ill-balanced with malnutrition and disease, especially in children, everywhere in evidence. Hot breads -- usually biscuits or corn pone -- dried beans, macaroni, salt pork, and molasses are the standard foods. Gardens are lacking or inadequate and are usually discouraged by the landlord; the cotton patch surrounds the house and even if there is a garden it will not begin to supply the family needs. Fruits, cereals, milk, and eggs are absent from the average diet. One-half of the sharecroppers and four-fifths of the farm laborers do not have cows, and two-fifths of the farm laborers do not have chickens. Such a condition on some of the best land in the Middle West is almost unbelievable.

"The typical housing and the average diet largely explain the tragic health conditions of the people. The mortality rates for preventable diseases are exceedingly high. The rate for malaria is higher in every county in the lowlands than for the State as a whole and in some years has been as much as twenty times the State rate. Typhoid rates range up to nine times the State rate. The pulmonary tuberculosis rates are often double the State rate. The death rate from pneumonia is often higher than in the State as a whole. The mortality rates for diarrhea and enteritis among children under two years have been as high as eighteen times the State rate. The infant mortality rate in 1934 ranged from 75 deaths under one year per 1,000 live births in Scott County to 158 per 1,000 in New Madrid, as compared with the State rate of 62 per 1,000. A visit by a physician must usually be preceded by a guarantee of the fee by the landlord. Thus illness in all age groups often lingers on until it is too late.



"The relief load is heaviest among white sharecroppers and farm laborers. Before Negroes receive relief in the area, they must be in much more desperate straits than the whites. Some of the landlords in the area have been relieved of the load of providing subsistence to their tenants by the governmental agencies providing relief. In the winter months after the cotton is picked the relief load rises; in the spring after cotton chopping begins the load declines. The substitution of farm laborers for sharecroppers was perhaps aided by the emergence of government relief. This instability affecting every member of the family appears to be a by-product of the tenure system.

#### Social Organization

"The social institutions are functioning indifferently so far as the needs of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes are concerned. Custom and lack of transportation facilities leaves them stranded. The system of public education is characterized by gross inequalities of opportunity as among classes with marked unequal opportunities for Negroes. Negro schools are maintained separately from the white schools and are distinctly inferior.

#### Schools

"A considerable proportion of the children of high school age do not live in districts with high schools. The necessity for having to arrange with other districts for high school training discourages many of the children from attending. Of 572 eighth grade graduates in the rural districts in the spring of 1934, only 332 entered high school in the autumn. The administration of compulsory attendance lags when applied to the low income groups where non-attendance is frequently encouraged by parents.

"The school system in this area is a multiplicity of one-room school districts, with poorly trained and low-paid teachers. The buildings and grounds are below standard, the library facilities are limited, and attendance even with a split term for "cotton vacation" is most irregular. Only 24 schools out of over 400 rural districts are approved by the State Department of Education as being up to the standard set for elementary schools. Such a situation makes it imperative that the school systems be organized upon some basis of taxation that will provide ample funds for better school buildings, more adequate equipment, and properly trained teachers. If the experience of other middle-western states such as Indiana is indicative, this will necessitate state wide system of school taxation based upon ability to pay, and a system of apportioning school funds based upon the need



for school facilities. The establishment of more and better high schools and a means of bringing the rural pupils to these would do much to disburden this area of the illiteracy and ignorance that is consigning the large mass of its people to a life of insecurity and poverty.

#### Adult Education

"Of equal importance is the program for the education of the adult population. The extension centers at our state colleges with their County Agricultural Agents were organized to provide a link between the great wealth of knowledge accumulated by research agencies and the rural farm family. Much progress has been made by the Agricultural Extension Service but it has been unable to reach, to any great extent, families of the sharecropper and farm laborer groups. The value of the Extension Services and similar organizations for a program of education of the under-privileged farm family needs to be recognized and their programs modified and expanded. In order to reach the lower income groups in areas such as Southeast Missouri, and bring about a fundamental readjustment of human resources to natural resources which will enable the majority of the farm families to attain a level of living and security which meets standards of minimum adequacy, it will be necessary for the Agricultural Extension Service and similar organizations to expand their programs far beyond the scope now possible with present funds and the number and type of field personnel available. In establishing the type of program needed, it must be recognized that the social problems of areas such as Southeast Missouri are matters of more than local concern, and the program planned and executed in terms of a State and National policy.

#### Recreational and Special Interest Groups

"While women's clubs, civic clubs, lodges, farm organization, and boys' and girls' clubs are found in abundance both in variety and numbers, their membership does not include the great mass of white sharecroppers and farm laborers, and Negroes. Public recreational facilities are limited, and the more desirable forms of commercial recreation are not available to the low income groups. Thus those people are left to their own devices and live in the midst of a dullness of life which is deadening. The failure of organized activities to reach these groups has led to the emergence of the night club or road house in rural areas, which with its dance hall, bar, gambling rooms, and other diversions caters to Negroes and white farm laborers and sharecroppers.



Churches

"The established churches of the area are reaching only a small proportion of the farm people. A large number of newer, less stabilized religious organizations have sprung into existence to serve the needs of the white sharecroppers and farm laborers and the Negroes, and are conducted on their cultural level. With the crudest edifices serving as churches and with untrained and often illiterate preachers, these sporadic sects are indulging in an emotional type of religion. Their appeal is often that of prejudice and emotion in relation to such factors as education, health, and improved agricultural practices.

"In this area of low standards of living and insecurity there is placed an unusually large burden upon the social institutions. The prevalence of emotional religious groups of a temporary nature, together with part-time and irregular services among the established churches, and the rapid development of roadhouses with their cheap entertainment and gambling devices is sufficient evidence that the established social organizations are not meeting the needs of these people. Because facilities for transportation are poor and lacking, and because most of the energy of the great mass of people is consumed making a mere subsistence, their community life must be meager. Recognition by institutionalized organizations, such as the church, of the need for more vital, more constructive and more extensive programs which will interest, and which will be carried to, the great mass of the people, should do much in alleviating the prejudice, resentment, and superstition of this area."

Housing, Equipment and Furnishings

Of the million and a half houses occupied by sharecroppers and farm laborers, the great majority are below standards of health and decency. In the Southeast Missouri area 9/ 85% of white farm laborer families and nearly all negro families lived in small unpainted box houses. A box house is a single wall house, constructed

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9/ "Rich Land - Poor People" by Max R. White, Douglas Ensminger, and Cecil L. Gregory. Farm Security Administration, Region III, Research Report No. 1



without wall studding. The boards are placed in an up and down position and nailed to a two by four framework much in the manner of constructing a box. Sometimes strips are placed over the cracks but frequently this is not done, in which case the house is more like a barn. Many of the houses do not have glass windows and those that do quite frequently have broken window panes with the holes covered over with cardboard, tin, or possibly filled in bad weather with an old quilt or bundle of rags.

In the Texas study of 573 laborers' houses 10/ the typical house was a two-room box house. Half of these were unscreened and most of the remainder were either inadequately screened or the screens were in poor condition. Nineteen per cent of the houses had no glass windows; 79% were unpainted; 32% were in bad condition; 50% were in fair condition; and only 18% were in good condition; 53% were valued at less than \$150 and 70% at less than \$250; 7% had no privy of any kind and 87% had unsanitary unimproved outdoor privies; 9.5% owned their homes; 54% received their house rent free; and 36.5% paid an average of about \$3 per month rent. The above facts apply to the permanent homes of Texas farm laborers. When these families go on the road to pick cotton, as over half of them do, they have practically no housing facilities at all. Of 283 such families surveyed away from home, 162 had no housing whatever, 2 were rooming and boarding, 13 lived in their trucks, 41 lived in open sheds, 11 lived in barns, 18 lived in little labor shacks, and 36 lived in houses similar to their permanent homes.

Housing in the sugar beet areas, as described by the Children's Bureau study 11/ are likewise very poor. "Forty-seven percent of the families interviewed at their residences were found to be living in quarters of not more than 2 rooms and only 29% lived in as many as 4 rooms. Some families shared their few rooms with 1 or 2 other families during the working season. Since the rooms of the typical 2-room shack or adobe house were not more than about 12 feet square there was usually no space for more than 2 beds. The large families would lay mattresses on the floor at night for the children to sleep on, and in the daytime stack these extra mattresses on top of the

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10/ "The Challenge of Under-Consumption" by Milo Perkins. U. S. D. A. News Release, February 24, 1940.

11/ See footnote No. 1



1 or 2 bedsteads. It was customary in many families for more than 2 people to sleep together in 1 bed or on 1 mattress, and this was a particularly trying situation when there was illness in the family. In nearly two-fifths of the families interviewed at their residences there were 3 or more persons to a room, and in two-thirds there were 2 or more to a room. Twenty-five families (4% of those reporting) actually had 6 or more persons to a room and a few had 10 persons to a room. There were 3 or more persons to a room in 52% of the migratory families interviewed at their beet-season residences, whereas the corresponding proportion for the non-migratory families was 35%."

#### Ownership of Subsistence Livestock

Several studies reveal that farm laborers own few subsistence livestock and hence are unable to produce an adequate food supply for their families. In North Carolina a survey of 148 farm laborer households 12/ showed that 19% possessed milk cows, 65% possessed chickens, and 38 possessed hogs.

A study in the Mississippi Delta 13/ showed that of 562 sharecropper families, 28.3% owned milk cows, 75.8% owned hogs, and 87.4% owned chickens. However, the average flock consisted of only 12 hens.

A South Carolina study 14/ of 75 wage laborers showed that 15% owned milk cows; 45% owned hogs; and 58% owned chickens. Of 149 South Carolina sharecropper families, however, 62% owned milk cows, 83% owned hogs and 94% owned chickens. The 75 farm laborer families produced an average of only \$38 worth of home used products as compared to an average of \$122 for the 149 sharecroppers.

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12/ See footnote 3

13/ Langsford, E. L. & Thibodeaux, B. H., "Plantation Organization and Operation in the Yozoo Mississippi Delta," U.S.D.A. Tech. Bul. No. 682, May, 1939

14/ Holcomb, E. J. & Aull, "Sharecroppers and Wage Laborers on Farms in Two South Carolina Counties," unpublished manuscript of a cooperative study between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Agricultural Experiment Station, and the South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station.



A study of 141 farm wage worker families in the Arkansas river valley 15/ showed that the average value of family living produced on the farm was \$106 which was supplemented by \$293 cash wages. Sharecroppers in the Arkansas river valleys produced \$152 worth of family living items and earned \$296 of additional cash income.

Another Arkansas study, by Barton and McNeely 16/ of 423 Arkansas wage-labor and sharecropper families found that home used products amounted to \$129 per family; \$58 of which was for house and fuel; \$18 for garden and other vegetables; \$50 for livestock and livestock products; and \$3 for miscellaneous. Only 7% of the 423 families owned automobiles, the average value of which was \$93.

#### Educational Status

The North Carolina study already referred to 17/ showed:

Of 568 husbands and wives of farm laborer households in six counties, 22% had never completed the first grade; only 12% had completed the seventh grade; and less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1% had graduated from high school. In the same counties, of 1344 husbands and wives of sharecropper families, 19% had never completed the first grade; only 21% had completed the seventh grade; only one in forty had graduated from high school. 18/

In Texas, of 640 heads of farm laborer households, 30% had never completed the first grade; only 8% had gone beyond the seventh grade; and only  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1% had finished high school. 19/

On the West Coast, Reuss, Landis, and Wakefield found that 54% of the migratory laborers in the hop industry had only an eighth grade education and that only 40% had been to high school. Five per cent had entered college. 20/

Dickens (Dorothy) 21/ found that most of the children of white sharecropper families in Mississippi never went beyond the eighth grade in school. Only 3 of 179 "out of school" sons of Mississippi white sharecroppers had graduated from high school, compared with 17 of 178 daughters.

15/ "A Study of Mobility and Levels of Living Among Negro Sharecroppers and Wage-Laborer Families of the Arkansas River Valleys," by O. E. Leonard and C. P. Loomis. Farm Population and Rural Welfare Activities Vol. XIII No. 2, April 15, 1939.

16/ "Recent Changes in Farm Labor Organization" by Glen T. Barton and J. G. McNeely. Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, September 1939.

17/ "Recent Changes in the Social and Economic Status of North Carolina Farm Families" by C. Horace Hamilton. North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 309.

18/ See page 169, Bulletin 309, North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station.

19/ See footnote 3/.

20/ See footnote 6/.

21/ "The Normal White Sharecropper Family With Grown Children" by Dorothy Dickens



## The Standards of Living of Farm Laborers

### Summary Statement

The farm laborer, until recently, was the forgotten man of rural social and economic studies. Much of the information available is in the form of fragmentary by-products of studies of farm operator households or of certain economic aspects of the problem. Before sound remedial measures can be planned, careful studies of farm laborer standards of living should be made in representative farming areas of the nation.

Already this committee has heard and seen much data bearing upon this problem. The maps on standards of living of all farm families reveal the general regional differences in standards of living of farm families. Although these maps do not include standards of living of farm laborer families, they do indicate the extent and character of the problem.

Much of the data available considers the farm laborer as an individual. I should like to direct your attention to the fact that the great majority of farm laborers lives in farm laborer households and that the heads as well as the members of these households depend largely upon farm wages for their income. I have estimated that there are at least 850,000 farm wage worker households in the United States. Counting 650,000 farm sharecropper households as farm laborers, there are, therefore, about 1,500,000 households of farm laborers in the United States. Although most of the heads of farm laborer households are younger than the heads of farm operator households, their families are relatively larger than those of farm operators. The birth rate among farm laborers is the highest in the nation being about 30% higher than among farm operator households. Hence, as can be seen from an accompanying chart, the farm laborer family has a large percentage of very young children.

The significance of the size and composition of the farm laborer's household is simply that the breadwinners in such households have more dependents to support and that they must do this on an average income lower than that of any occupational group in the nation. Since the farm laborer population makes up at least twenty per cent of the farm population, and since they are reproducing at a higher rate than other groups, the problem of child welfare among such groups becomes a national problem.

All studies indicate that the housing of farm laborer families, both at home and on the road, is deplorably and inexcusably deficient. The houses are too small; they are in poor condition; they are inadequately furnished; sanitary toilet facilities are lacking; few houses are adequately screened; too many of them let in the rain and cold wind through cracks in the walls and holes in the roofs; and practically none of the houses have electric lights, running water, radios, and telephones. The typical laborer home in many parts of the nation is a small, unpainted, two-room shack or box house in poor condition; set in unattractive surroundings; inhabited by a family of six people, four of whom work for low wages and enjoy very scanty perquisites in the form of free rent, fuel, and garden space. Very few farm laborer families enjoy the benefits of a milk cow, hogs, and chick-



ens, the basic necessities for producing their home food supply.

Contrary to popular belief, the typical farm laborer family does not have a cheap automobile by which to travel around over the country looking for work. Most studies show that less than 20% own automobiles.

Automobiles owned by the few are cheap, ranging in value from \$25 to \$100. Transient workers are apparently depending increasingly on trucks which carry from 20 to 40 workers at a time hundreds of miles across the country to do seasonal labor. This type of transportation is not conducive to decent morals and standards of living.

The food of farm laborer households has been found to be deficient in amount and in the necessary nutritional qualities. Pork, biscuits, cabbage, turnips, irish potatoes, dried beans and peas, and molasses are found to be the most common items in the diet of farm laborers and rarely are these found in balanced quantities. On the road, many laborers depend on canned sardines, cheese, and crackers, and other cheaper canned goods.

The inadequate diet and unsanitary living conditions result at best in inefficiency and at worst in high rates of morbidity and mortality. Preventable diseases all too frequent among farm laborers are malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, diarrhea, and enteritis. Infant mortality rates are high. Midwives, many of them inadequately trained, deliver the farm laborers' babies.

Families are so large, however, that the death of an infant or a still birth is frequently considered a blessing not any too well disguised - like the North Carolina woman who said she had so many children because she never had any "graveyard" luck. 1/

Farm laborers, like other low income families, must spend practically all of their income on food, clothing, shelter and a few other necessities. This means that they have very little left for advancement items, the things which add sociability, learning, and zest to a family's level of living.

Needless to say, farm laborer families have little savings and only a few carry insurance. A prevalent type of insurance carried by laborers provides only for burial expenses. Even though the deceased farm laborer may not get to enjoy the fruits of this type of savings, his family, no doubt, gains something in prestige and in community status by having a "decent" burial in the family. Incidentally, the typical system of burial insurance affords undertakers a convenient means of selling their services and of collecting in advance.

A common type of insurance carried by the aged poor in the country is the Mutual Assessment type. According to this plan, the insured pays only

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1/ Margaret Jarman Hagood, "Mothers of the South", Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press, 1939.



when some other old person dies. A poor farm laborer may pay on this type of insurance for several years only to find that his insurance company has gone broke or has been consolidated with another company, and that as a result he must pay a larger assessment or possibly receive less insurance. The only ones who profit from this type of insurance are those who die young.

The educational status of farm laborers and their children is shown by all studies to be considerably lower than that of other farm people. The cause of this situation lies partly in the inadequacy of schools, short school terms, but mainly in the irregularity of school attendance, which in turn is due to child labor and to ill health.

An unfortunate aspect of the farm laborers' status is that even the most ambitious of them find it difficult to help themselves. Unlike the poor man in the city, the farm laborer who lives in an isolated rural area does not have easy access to such institutions and services as hospitals, schools, libraries, doctors, and organized welfare organizations. The poor farm laborer, unlike the poor tenant or owner earning approximately the same income, does not have the resources of land and livestock to produce their own food supply on the farm. Another handicap of the farm laborer is that in the busy seasons he and his family must work early and late in the fields. He has little time, therefore, to spend in raising a garden or tending to his cows, hogs, and chickens, if he should have such. Besides, few farmers who employ labor are able and willing to supply enough land for a garden and for feed land. Once a system like this is set up, it is difficult to change it. The laborer, not having been trained in his youth to produce home food supplies, has little inclination to do so when he is grown. Farmer employers, therefore, conclude that the laborer is improvident and lazy.

